

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1953

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Rachel W. Coffin, Editor

Week of October 19, 1953

1953 PRODUCTIONS Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared
In These Volumes

Stage Play	Page
1952 Vol.	
Bernardine	231
Children's Hour (The)	151
Deep Blue Sea (The)	207
*Dial M for Murder	215
Evening with Beatrice Lillie (An)	254
Male Animal (The)	297
Mrs. McThing	359
My Darlin' Aida	218
New Faces of 1952	278
Pal Joey	398
*Seven Year Itch (The)	186
Time of the Cuckoo (The)	235
Time Out for Ginger	177
Two's Company	157
Whistler's Grandmother	160
*Wish You Were Here	266

1951 Vol.

Fourposter (The)	190
*King and I (The)	304
Moon Is Blue (The)	322

1950 Vol.

*Guys and Dolls	185
-----------------------	-----

1949 Vol.

*South Pacific	312
----------------------	-----

*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled
to play week of October 19, 1953

1953 PRODUCTIONS Premieres During 1953

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	Page	Stage Play	Page
Anna Russell and Her Little Show	289	*Me and Juliet	298
Bat (The)	390	Men of Distinction	307
Be Your Age	397	Merchant of Venice (The)	340
Bleak House	315	Mid-Summer	386
Camino Real	330	Misalliance	354
*Can-Can	304	*My 3 Angels	354
Carnival in Flanders	286	Oklahoma!	294
Crucible (The)	383	On Borrowed Time	365
Date With April (A)	318	*Picnic	348
Emperor's Clothes (The)	368	Pin to See the Peepshow (A)	278
*End as a Man	Reviews will Appear in Next Issue	Pink Elephant (The)	312
*Fifth Season (The)	380	*Porgy and Bess	337
Hazel Flagg	362	Red Rainbow (A)	281
Horses in Midstream	325	Room Service	322
John Brown's Body	358	Strong Are Lonely (The)	269
*Late Love	258	*Take a Giant Step	274
*Little Hut (The)	262	*Tea and Sympathy	266
Love of Four Colonels (The)	394	*Teahouse of the August Moon (The)	254
Love's Labour's Lost	372	Touchstone	375
Maggie	351	*Wonderful Town	344

CRITICS' CIRCLE AWARD 320

Theatre Openings

"Late Love" "End as a Man"
"The Teahouse of the August Moon"

*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of October 19, 1953

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK POST NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Teahouse of the August Moon"

Daily Mirror

October 16, 1953

'Teahouse' a Smash Hit, Rich in Comedy

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Maurice Evans has teamed with George Schaefer to give us a smash hit called "The Teahouse of the August Moon." It was penned by John Patrick, after a novel of the same name by Vern Sneider. It's a good thing the Martin Beck is a big theatre, because the demand for tickets is going to be terrific.

"The Teahouse of the August Moon" has to do with the American occupation of Okinawa. Capt. Fisby is sent to the impoverished village of Tobiki to teach democracy, industry and agriculture. He has the natives make cricket cages, straw hats and lacquer bowls by the dozens. Unfortunately, the members of our armed forces don't want such wares.

WITH THE INHABITANTS' spirits at lowest ebb, it is, ironically, 'spirits of another sort' that eventually put Tobiki on the map in capital letters. For Fisby discovers that his charges know how to make a high-powered brandy in from seven to ten days.

And this is something our boys do want and will pay for.

When a geisha girl is sent to him as a present, Fisby uses the lumber, intended for a schoolhouse shaped like the Pentagon, to build a teahouse for her. The captain's superior learns of his unorthodox administration, and raises the devil. But the canny Okinawans, who have outwitted conquerors before, are quite capable of setting matters right.

"The Teahouse" beautifully blends satire, robust comedy, charm and heart. It has everything that a solid click needs. It even has a dash of human and practical philosophy. It's a laugh riot from start to finish. Beginning with a first-rate script, di-

rector Robert Lewis has made the most of it.

JOHN FORSYTHE, who headed the national company of "Mister Roberts," is perfect as Captain Frisby, who learns that acceptance of the inevitable has its compensations. David Wayne etches Sakini, the roguish, shrewd and loyal interpreter, with flawless style. He also serves as the ingratiating commentator on the proceedings. It is a completely winning performance.

Paul Ford, as a pompous, regulation-bound colonel, and Larry Gates, as a bewildered psychiatrist, are hilarious. Mariko Niki, graceful and willowy, is a captivating Lotus Blossom. We regret that an on-rushing deadline doesn't permit us to single out other members of the large cast for special citations. So here's a deep bow from the waist to them all, including Saki, the goat.

Peter Larkin and Noel Taylor have designed delightful sets and costumes. The incidental music by Dai-Keong Lee is also helpful.

"THE TEAHOUSE" makes the Martin Beck a pleasant place to be. We only hope you will be able to share our enjoyment of it in the near future. If you are wise, you'll make your reservations immediately. For they were dusting off the SRO sign as we taxied to our typewriter.

It's wonderful to see our Fabulous Invalid bouncing

"TEAHOUSE OF THE AUGUST MOON"

Play by John Patrick, based on the novel by Vern Sneider; staged by Robert Lewis; settings by Peter Larkin; costumes by Noel Taylor; presented by Maurice Evans in association with George Schaefer at the Martin Beck Theatre, October 15, 1953. The cast: Sakini, ... David Wayne

Sgt. Gregovich, ... Harry Jackson
Col. Wainwright Purdy III, ... Paul Ford

Capt. Fisby, ... John Forsythe
Old Woman, ... Naoko Kondo
Old Woman's Daughter, ... Mara Kim

Lady Astor, ... Saki
Ancient Man, ... Kame Ishikawa
Mr. Sumata, ... Kale Deel
Mr. Sumata's Father, ... Kikuo Hiromura

Mr. Hokaido, ... Chuck Morgan
Mr. Selko, ... Haim Winant
Mr. Oshira, ... William Hansen
Mr. Omura, ... Kuraji Seida
Mr. Keora, ... Yuki Shimoda
Miss Higa Jiga, ... Shizu Moriya
Lotus Blossom, ... Mariko Niki
Capt. McLean, ... Larry Gates

back to its feet again. Drs. Evans and Schaefer certainly prescribed a tasty and effective tonic in "The Teahouse of the August Moon." Don't miss the new arrival unless you hate to laugh.

New York Post

October 16, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Thoroughly Delightful Comedy

A warm, charming and thoroughly delightful comedy has been made by John Patrick out of "The Teahouse of the August Moon," Vern Sneider's novel about the American wartime occupation of the embattled island of Okinawa. Knowingly and colorfully staged and played to perfection by

David Wayne, John Forsythe and a fine cast of Orientals and Occidentals, the result is a wise, gently satirical and beautifully understanding dramatic fantasy concerning the impact on each other of East and West. The new play, which opened at the Martin Beck last night, offers the most complete joy the theater has provided for many a month.

Over and beyond its rich and deliciously humorous and touching qualities as sheer entertainment, I think the most enchanting quality of "The Teahouse of the August Moon" is its gay, smiling tribute to the human spirit and the capacity of mankind for mutual understanding. Rarely has Rudyard Kipling's

famous dictum been disproved so effectually, and the reply the play makes is all the more persuasive because it is so good-humored, bantering and unpatronizing. East and West, that presumably impossible twain, do meet, and, while the honors are chiefly on the side of the East, there is glory enough for both in the meeting.

If the colonel in charge of the American military government in Okinawa is hidebound, narrow-minded and stupid and even the sympathetic captain a little humorless and dense upon occasion, and all the wisdom and tolerance on the side of the Okinawans, there is victory on our

side in the play's happy willingness to accept and applaud the things that the amiable countrymen of a Far Eastern island have to teach us. At the end, the Americans have learned a great deal from those odd Orientals and they, in their turn, have come to have a certain appreciation of us. Without ever being serious-minded, the comedy has a needed lesson to offer.

I suppose it would be fairly easy to point out flaws in Mr. Patrick's play. Its well-meaning stuffed shirt of a general is possibly a little too fatuous; its agreeable young captain a little too tongue-tied when called upon to defend what he has done to help the village of Tobiki. Conceivably, the second act has a momentary tendency to sag in the middle. But any such minor weaknesses, if they actually exist, are almost frantically unimportant in the face of the gay, human and irresistibly winning fantasy of the tale of the young officer sent to teach the islanders democracy by the book, who learns something of the brotherhood of seemingly alien races.

Because David Wayne, as the captain's guide, philosopher and friend, who is also the interlocutor of the play, gives one of the most effortlessly charming

performances I can recall seeing on a stage, it might be easy to overlook what a brilliant characterization he is also offering. Even without a word to say, he can be wise or sympathetic or mildly disapproving, and, when speech is added to what he has to do, he manages it with superb understanding and quiet subtlety. It is about as complete and masterly a portrayal as the stage could well provide, and it deserves to be accepted as a humorous classic of character acting.

John Forsythe, who looks and sounds disturbingly like Henry Fonda, is splendid as the young officer, while Larry Gates as an army psychiatrist with a passion for agriculture, Paul Ford as the foolish but well-meaning colonel, Mariko Niki as a geisha girl, and all of the large supporting cast are just what they should be. There is even a goat that knows how to act. Robert Lewis has staged the play with understanding skill, and the production, in addition to everything else, is imaginative and beautiful. "The Teahouse of the August Moon" goes to show how richly entertaining and what a contribution to authentic brotherhood the theater can be.

"The Teahouse of the August Moon"—continued

The New York Times

October 16, 1953

THE TEAHOUSE OF THE AUGUST MOON

John Patrick's Comedy About
the American Occupation
of Okinawa Island

By BROOKS ATKINSON

John Patrick has turned some portentous ideas into a delightful comedy in "The Teahouse of the August Moon," which opened at the Martin Beck last evening. This is the story of the American occupation in Okinawa that was told originally in a novel by Vern Sneider. If Mr. Sneider and Mr. Patrick did not have a sense of humor the meeting of East and West in this play might be a bruising experience. The differences are great and fundamental. But "The Teahouse of the August Moon" is a light and sagacious comedy. The form is inventive and familiar. The point of view is droll. And as the middleman between Okinawa and America, David Wayne gives a rich, humorous, forgiving performance that

must have come straight out of heaven, it is so wise and pure. Under Robert Lewis' direction, Mr. Patrick's play is completely captivating.

The story is easily told. Captain Fisby, an aptly named bumbling American officer, sets himself up in a small town, Tobiki, to represent the army of occupation. Washington has provided him with detailed directions for introducing democracy into an Oriental village. The directions call for the erection of a schoolhouse in the shape of a pentagon.

Although Captain Fisby begins according to the rulebook, the realities of the village defeat him. Washington seems to have overlooked the cultural habits of Tobiki. Human nature keeps intruding on the plan. By natural processes of development the schoolhouse becomes a teahouse and the native industries, which the Army is supposed to foster, simmer down to a highly profitable manufacture of brandy from sweet potatoes.

If the story were told literally, it might not suffice for a whole

evening in the theatre; and, in fact, it might be argued that it goes to pieces in the second act. But Mr. Patrick is also a stylist. With the connivance of Mr. Wayne as interlocutor, he presents "The Teahouse of the August Moon" as a piece of exotic make-believe in a style as intimate as a fairy story. What Mr. Patrick says is interesting. How he says it is imaginative and original. For he has contrived to break down the barrier between stage and audience and present his fable as something shared equally on both sides of the footlights.

This is just the sort of contrived improvisation that Mr. Lewis likes to fool around with, and he has done a beautiful job. Oh, there may be a little too much cuteness in the musical underscoring of the jokes, but there's nothing so precious that anyone should worry about it. Behind a striking bamboo curtain, Peter Larkin has designed a fluid production that covers the whole subject agreeably. The performance is an unalloyed delight.

Paul Ford's plain, corned portrait of the incredulous colonel who cannot believe what he sees is immensely funny and immensely winning. So is Larry Gates' acting of the Army psychiatrist who sheds his science and goes native the minute he becomes acquainted with Captain Fisby. And John Forsythe is as perfect in the part of the captain as Henry Fonda was in "Mister Roberts"—something of the same genial style of acting and very much of the same inflection of voice.

As the geisha girl who makes a teahouse more attractive than a school, Mariko Niki, a Tokyo actress, gives one of those lovely, mannered, liquid performances that derive from oriental art—likely a Japanese print in dance form. Mr. Wayne's leprechaun from "Finian's Rainbow" has now developed into a figure of wisdom, humor and pantomime. As the interpreter, Mr. Wayne sets the tone for the play in a preliminary scene and maintains it throughout the evening in the grace and gentleness of an imagined human being. It is wonderful work.

So is "The Teahouse of the August Moon" as a whole. Although East and West look at each other with considerable hostility, they can meet on friendly terms if they keep their sense of humor. Things that might easily make for anger become reasonable, friendly and sweetly comic in this ingratiating play.



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

October 16, 1953

'Teahouse' Is Smooth Brew

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

By now there is probably a line all around the block from the Martin Beck Theater, where "Teahouse of the August Moon" opened last night.

It looks exactly like a howling hit. It kept the premiere audience rocking with ecstatic and uproarious laughter. This is an enchanting play, filled with the most extraordinary good sense about human and international relations.

Lyrical Gaiety.

It never loses sight of its fine logic, yet it is told with the lyrical gaiety of a musical, as little joyous incidents mount up to a delightful story.

This is a tale of America's sale of democracy to the so-called uncivilized world. There are not likely to be any more pleasurable accounts of this big deal.

A young officer, imaginative enough to have a slight poetic bent, and certainly endowed with

a sense of humor, goes off to a remote village on Okinawa, armed with official plans to restore the town's livelihood.

He is shortly caught up with the insistent logic of the natives, who are much more anxious for a place to sip tea and watch the moon, than they are for a schoolhouse the shape of the Pentagon Building. They have no five-sided children, they explain.

He's Converted.

Before long the officer, led by the nose by his enchanting interpreter, is converted to the peaceful pleasant ways of the Okinawans. Their minds meet in a money-making explosion when he learns they manufacture brandy. Shortly all the money on the island is arriving there, and the people are in fine fettle.

There is a brief moment when it looks too good a dream to be real, but in the end it appears that all is saved, as the local boys

would have saved it on their own anyway.

The play is told with an Oriental flavor, as David Wayne, playing the interpreter, also introduces the scenes.

Wayne a Real Star.

Mr. Wayne is unquestionably one of our finest young actors, and with "Teahouse of the August Moon" you may well decide he is the finest altogether. Endowed with innate charm and taste, he projects this long role with great variety and infallible precision. It is a triumph of well-learned and exquisitely employed artistry.

Co-starred with Mr. Wayne is John Forsythe as the Army officer, and it is a fine job he does. The young man is always on the edge of vagueness, always on the border of impracticality, but as Mr. Forsythe plays him, he remains compassionate and self-questioning.

Paul Ford as the Commanding Officer gives one of the most delightful comic performances I can recall. He is the bumbling yet lovable, insecure, pompous and anxious senior, whose favorite gesture is to reach for the regulations and favorite pastime is to misquote some very well-known author.

Larry Gates has some shrewd moments of comedy as the psychiatrist who is sent to investigate the young officer and takes after his ways, very happily, since he has always wanted to farm.

Mariko Niki is a gentle and lovely Geisha Girl, whose true profession has to be explained as part of the comedy plot. She dances as delicately as if she had stepped off a porcelain bowl.

Great Designs.

Peter Larkin has designed a production of really great beauty, which affords the action some breathtaking moments, as when Miss Niki appears in the distance against a yellow sky, or when the Teahouse is miraculously reconstructed out of thin air.

There are touching moments in John Patrick's adaptation of Vern Sneider's novel, as well as the dominating hilarious ones. And between them, with Robert Lewis' very knowing direction, they have turned out a first-rate hit.

"The Teahouse of the August Moon"—continued

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune

October 16, 1953

—THEATER—

'Teahouse of the August Moon'

By WALTER F. KERR

"THE TEAHOUSE OF THE AUGUST MOON" is a brightly colored comic-strip with a bland, broad grin on its face and a healthy share of mockery in its heart. John Patrick has adapted the new, and happily droll, adventure at the Martin Beck from Vern Sneider's novel about the problems of "democratizing" Okinawa during the latter stages of the late war. In fabricating what is in effect a satirical fantasy on political ineptitude, Mr. Patrick has not only extracted what was funniest and most apt from the Sneider original. It seems to me that, in a good half dozen ways, he has improved upon it.

As a book, the "Teahouse" was never quite certain whether it was off on a fantastic lark in the wilder manner of Evelyn Waugh or whether it was after the sort of mildly touching, and thoroughly plausible, horseplay of James A. Michener.

Mr. Patrick has faced up to the problem and, I think, solved it handily. He has taken a hand-

ful of amiable caricatures—a befuddled Captain, a cliché-spouting Colonel, an Army psychiatrist with a passion for the soil, and a quicksilver rogue who was born on the island—and pasted them all flat against an enchanting Oriental landscape. The whole thing quickly becomes something painted—in bold and childlike hues—and it moves across the stage like a miniature circus.

There is, for instance, an ebullient ringmaster in David Wayne, just returned from an esthetically unprofitable sojourn in Hollywood. Mr. Wayne plays Sakini, an unpredictable but magnificently practical native, and he makes his first appearance before a series of toylike bamboo screens.

Mr. Wayne's function is not only that of interpreter to some very confused Army officials, but interpreter to us as well. He describes the play to us, makes certain that scenes are revealed on time, and in general manipulates both the story and its one-dimensional people with

the skill of a tongue-in-cheek puppet-master.

He escorts the author impishly through his determination to give us glimpses of the odd goings-on in a reconstructed village. He is immensely funny as he helps pile a local family sky-high on an overloaded jeep, as he makes the native dialect seem far more rational in its syntax than English ever was, as he shows a hard-luck Captain how to satisfy every last islander by giving them the teahouse of their dreams.

The Captain himself—a man who is accident-prone, who regards machines as his mortal enemies, and who has been transferred all over the world in search of a berth that will suit him—is engagingly played by John Forsythe. The psychiatrist, sent to prevent further damage to government morale and immediately helpful in increasing the chaos, is a wistful cartoon in the hands of Larry Gates.

And to crown the collection of amiable improbabilities there is Paul Ford as Colonel Wainwright Purdy III. With a face that seems to have been created especially for the occasion by Steinberg, Mr. Ford lets his jaw hang slack as the "progress reports" get worse, stitches platitude to platitude in pompous sobriety, and is extremely funny every strut of the way.

There are, it must be said, some traces left of the novel's see-saw style. The humor drops, on occasion, to this sort of thing:

"It's by Victor Hugo."

"Oh, yes. How I loved 'A Tale of Two Cities.'"

And I found myself intermittently disturbed by the Broadwayese which pops up in the native double-talk. David Wayne has, alongside some genuinely amusing lines, been asked to rattle on about the dues paid to the "Geisha Guild," to describe it as a "closed shop," and to point out that a girl who is very much on the premises is a "member in good standing." At another point in the proceedings Mr. Wayne trots across the stage, to fill a pause, with a shrug and a weary "No comment." The character is supposed to have picked up an smattering of Americanese; but the rhythms, and the specific locutions sometimes suggest an intimate knowledge of second-rate American vaudeville.

These are blemishes on the play, and they interfere with its calculated, but otherwise palatable, charm. You're likely to forgive them in exchange for a moment while Mariko Niki—as a Geisha girl who 'belongs' to the unwilling Captain—dances under an August moon, or for another in which the entire company magically assembles designer Peter Larkin's dazling red and gold teahouse.

DAILY NEWS

October 16, 1953

'The Teahouse of the August Moon' A Captivating and Lovely Comedy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

John Patrick's "The Teahouse of the August Moon" is—and I choose the adjective most carefully—a wonderful comedy, and last evening at the Martin Beck Theatre it was given a most beguiling production by Maurice Evans and George Schaefer and their director, Robert Lewis.

It is a cumbersome title for so adroit a play, but Patrick inherited it from Vern Sneider, whose novel he has adapted for the stage. For all I care they can call it "Laff," "Ho-ho" or "How to Win Friends and Influence People." Titles make no difference when a comedy is as charming, as humorous and as captivatingly acted as this one is.

Funny and Moving.

"The Teahouse," to give it an affectionate nickname, is about an Army officer, a captain, who has

been assigned to be the postwar ruler of the village of Tobiki on the Japanese island of Okinawa. His duty is to bring U. S. democracy and U. S. efficiency to this ancient and delightfully unbelievable little community. In the end his mission is completed, but without difficulties. For instance, the schoolhouse he must build under government regulations with government lumber somehow turns into a teahouse for a geisha girl, or Japanese Texas Guinan.

The play is in turn uproarious and touching. Without in the least being an imitation it reminds one at this time or that of "A Bell for Adano," "Mister Roberts" and "South Pacific." Not a bad reminder.

The captain in "The Teahouse of the August Moon," John Forsythe, soon finds himself in the hands of an ever-so-polite Okinawan, David Wayne, who speaks a little English and is the greatest fixer since Orville Wright repaired bicycles. Under Wayne's guidance, Forsythe manages to bring prosperity to this Oriental whistle-stop, largely by selling a native brandy made of sweet potatoes. This accomplishment brings infinite distress to Forsythe's commanding colonel, Paul Ford.

Beautiful Production.

Wayne, who talks a great deal like my boyhood hero, Hashimura Togo, obliges the audience by coming before the bamboo curtain and explaining each scene before it happens. No explanations are necessary, of course, because all of it is solid, sharp comedy, but Wayne manages to convey extraordinary charm in his role as interpreter.

Lewis, the director, has evoked fine performances from everybody in the company. Ford is enormously funny as the serious-minded colonel and Forsythe is completely likable as a young captain who suddenly finds himself the owner of a geisha girl without knowing exactly what a geisha girl is. (And if you think you know, you probably are mistaken.) Mariko Niki, as the girl, is a person of notable grace and beauty, and Larry Gates is amusing as an Army doctor.

The physical production of "The Teahouse of the August Moon," designed for both sets and costumes by Peter Larkin, is simple but stunning, and there is some highly amusing background music composed by Dai-Keong Lee. There can't be any more enjoyable theatre than this comedy.

"The Teahouse of the August Moon"—continued

Journal  American

October 16, 1953

Comedy a Colossal Hit

By JOHN MCCLAIN

THERE IS USUALLY an intangible moment during the first night of a big hit when a sort of infectious confidence spreads through an audience, and from then on it is clear sailing.

Mediocre lines are received with laughter and applause, tears flow freely when the heroine merely stubs her toe. The characters have endeared themselves to the spectators, and they can do no wrong.

This may not occur until the middle of the play, or even later, but last night, at the premiere of "The Teahouse of the August Moon" it took place about ten seconds after David Wayne shuffled out, on the stage of the Martin Beck Theatre in the costume of an Okinawan native, beamed broadly at the audience, and explained in broken English what the show was going to be about.

The mood was magically established; the curtain could have gone up on a monkey act and the audience would have loved every second of it.

Warm Feeling

What the curtain went up on, actually, was one of the most charming and hilarious productions to be unveiled in these parts since "South Pacific." Mr.

Wayne's mood never faltered, in fact he had a great deal to do with keeping it alive through the next two-and-a-half hours.

It is rare indeed in the theatre that scenes are written and played with such skill that the laughter sustains into the succeeding action, and this happened frequently during the evening.

Yet through all the hilarity there ran a warm philosophy, simply expressed. The point seemed to be that life is a pretty silly business at best, but it's just as silly in Okinawa as the U. S., so why should anybody get sore at anybody else. Moscow papers please copy.

John Patrick, who adapted the play from Vern Snelder's novel, has skillfully exploited all the sure-pop ingredients that are to be found in the relationship of U. S. service men to island natives; very much the same situations that proved so serviceable in "South Pa-

cific," with slight overtones of "Mister Roberts" and "The King and I."

Here he pursues the career of an Army of Occupation officer stationed in a remote town in Okinawa. His duty is to teach Democracy to the natives, and there is a stern and stupid Colonel breathing down his neck to insure the strict enforcement of the Manual of Occupation.

Enter Trouble

But the young officer has not prepared himself for the ingenuous charm of the people. Within a matter of days he finds himself the owner of a Grade A Geisha girl; the materials sent him for the construction of a school are being used to build a teahouse and he himself, in an effort to improve the economy of the village, has taken to selling the principal product, potato brandy, to all the surrounding Army and Navy officers' clubs.

The gala opening of the teahouse is, of course, the moment chosen by the Colonel to make his inspection of the village, and the ensuing eruption is volcanic. The officer is sure to be court martialed, the Colonel demoted.

But when life is darkest, word arrives that Congress, that old standby, has received re-

ports that this is the most progressive village on the island, and all is forgiven.

David Wayne, playing a native interpreter for the Army, skips blithely through almost every instant of the proceedings. He introduces each scene and then dashes through the curtain to act in it; his only moments of inactivity are short naps on stage when his official services are not required. It is an ingratiating and overwhelming performance.

Superb Job

John Forsythe, who looks and talks more like Henry Fonda than Henry Fonda, is droll and engaging as the young officer. Paul Ford, as the Colonel, and Larry Gates, as a psychiatrist, provide the most side-shattering telephone scene in my memory, and William Hansen gives a laudable interpretation of an old native.

Mariko Niki, speaking no word of English, is decorative and convincing as the highly stylized Geisha girl.

Robert Lewis deserves a special citation for direction and Peter Larkin has done a superb job with the complicated and tasteful settings.

This is a colossal hit in my book.

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews

Enjoyed when first received—Treasured for future reference—

A Valuable and Authoritative Record of the Contemporary Theatre

An Excellent Gift Solution

"Late Love"



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

October 14, 1953

'Late Love' Pivots on Old Triangle

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Late Love" will not last long at the National unless miracles are in line.

It is a loose-jointed, light little play with all sorts of nice intentions of being a comedy. But it is a farcical idea, treated too seriously, which changes its mind all too late. The energy which its last sequence is endowed with can do little more than dull the memory of the long initial passages.

Roughly speaking this is a triangle story, about a hearty dame, who palps portraits, a cheery banker who is a clown and a novelist who seems pompous until he turns out to be merely unspeakable.

Video to Stage.

Arlene Francis wields the brush and oils, as well as her well-known sense of humor. A firm fixture in television, she must nevertheless thirst for the

footlights. She probably could not resist a juicy telephone scene in the third act, and a certain number of lines which she makes sound funnier than they could possibly look on paper.

Besides she is fought over by two men, a situation few actresses spurn.

When the talk meanders, I found myself wondering how nice it must be to have Arlene Francis around the home, for real.

For the ladies there is a comparable compensation, I should guess, in wondering whether anyone of them can have Lucile Watson's composure and forthrightness at that age.

Whipped Lines.

Miss Watson treats lines like fine whips. She can snap them under your nose and walk off the stage, before they have really cut into your head. The trouble is here, that in spite of her, they frequently do cut in.

She is playing an apparently dull, domineering old woman who keeps her middle-aged son and his daughter on a regimen of idiotic intolerance. The fact that two thirds of the way through the evening she completely changes face is not enough for the play, though it gives Miss Watson a chance to sparkle.

Her incredible son, the really intolerant member of the family, is played with appropriate pomposity by Neil Hamilton, who must rue the day he ever undertook so potentially disagreeable a character.

Share of Laughter.

As his wisecracking banker friend, Frank Albertson gets his full share of laughter in a role which under different circumstances would have seemed tailor-made for him. Elizabeth Montgomery and Cliff Robertson are agreeable young lovers, and Ann Dere plays a maid sharply.

"LATE LOVE"

Comedy by Rosemary Casey; staged by John C. Wilson; setting and lighting by Stewart Chaney; presented by Michael Abbott with the cooperation of associate producers, Howard Erskine and Bonnie Alden; at the National Theatre, October 13, 1953. The cast:

Billy Gordon... Frank Albertson
Matthew Anderson...
Cliff Robertson
Sarah... Ann Dere
Graham Colby... Neil Hamilton
Janet Colby...
Elizabeth Montgomery
Mrs. Colby... Lucile Watson
Constance Warburton...
Arlene Francis

The author has made the major mistake of leaving the audience out of her joke for an hour and a half. She gets one big laugh this way, while if she had told us what we guessed all along, she might have had hundreds.

My chief resentment of the evening is that these two agents (and the author) assume Miss Francis could not get for keeps 40-odd escorts more fascinating than they are, just by smiling at them.

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune

October 14, 1953

—THEATER—

'Late Love'

By WALTER F. KERR

"LATE LOVE" is a lazy Sunday afternoon of a play—amiable, easygoing, and a couple of cat-naps will get you through it.

Author Rosemary Casey has a very pleasant way of letting her characters lounge around a living-room. She doesn't push them. They don't try very hard for wisecracks. They catch on quickly to whatever is going on around them—people fall in love with the bat of an eyelash and everybody else knows about it not more than two bats later—and they are cheerfully candid as they talk things over. Since there is never anything very urgent about this romantic house-party, a variety of handsome, literate, and well-bred charmers simply snuggle about the stage in

twos and threes, making up little conversational teams. In fact, they are so thoroughly relaxed that when something modestly demanding does come up—such as taking an easel apart and carting it off the premises—they barely seem up to the task.

Civility does have its drawbacks. Miss Casey's mildly amusing parlor game revolves about a successful author whose publishers have arranged that a distinguished woman artist shall paint his portrait. Arriving at his Connecticut home, this forthright girl is dismayed to discover herself in what amounts to a sedately-run mausoleum (a "better-bred Wuthering Heights," some one calls it) and she decides to let some fresh air

in. The evil genie of the place seems to be the novelist's mother, a frosty dowager, who pours tea as though it were hemlock and who has banned gin, cigarettes, and even radio music from the premises.

The author of the new play at the National has one small surprise for us. In the second act it turns out that mother is really a gay old sort, secretly given to spiking her lemonade, and that it is her fatuous son who believes that smoking and drinking are incompatible with the literary life. Once the secret is out, there are sly and good-natured attempts to thwart the stuffy gentleman: his daughter is married off to a young scholar he disapproves of, and mama herself is whisked off for a time on the town.

In all of this agreeable chit-chat, though, there is little that is strikingly tart or cumulatively exhilarating. It may just be that the people are altogether too agreeable. (The prig isn't on much, and when he is he's rather pale about it.) The characters take to describing one another as "magnificent" or "so amusing," they are fre-

quently to be found in affectionate embrace, and they coo at each other quite a lot. As comedy, "Late Love" falls victim to an overdose of sweetness.

Its players are suitably radiant. Arlene Francis is the interloping artist, and she is graceful indeed as she tries to outmaneuver a matriarch, or as she suspends a smile while her eyes take shrewd stock of a family situation. Lucile Watson is the libeled lady of the house whose testime entrance is heralded by a sturdy offstage gong, and it is Miss Watson who gets the benefit of the play's occasional asperity. She handles the Jekyll-Hyde portrait with crusty relish. When she is good, she is monstrously virtuous; and when she is bad, she is splendid.

Robert Montgomery's daughter Elizabeth is trim, pretty and attractively petulant as a love-lorn youngster; Cliff Robertson is particularly good fun as her callow but reasonably courageous swain. Neil Hamilton is starchy and polite as the villain of the piece, and Frank Albertson is ingratiating as a forthright friend of the family.

New York Post

October 14, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

Of the Home Life of an Author

"Late Love" is a good-natured and inoffensive little comedy that might be quite popular in the summer playhouses or, if there still were such things, small-town stock companies. College dramatic societies might well revel in it. But on Broadway, where the admission prices are stiff and the standards for success, with a few notable exceptions, are reasonably exacting, I'm afraid the new play by Rosemary Casey, which opened last night at the National Theatre, is lost and desolate, despite its air of friendliness and the presence of an attractive cast.

What Miss Casey has written is a contrived and artless tale about a handsome stuffed-shirt of an author, who lives in prim, pompous and solemn grandeur, presumably because his snobbish and puritanical mother dominates his household. It tells of the

revolution in the family that occurs with the arrival of a frank, outspoken and courageous lady portrait painter, who doesn't like the look of things and shows some signs of developing a romantic attitude toward the author, who, I suspect, must have been a fairly incompetent one.

The Surprise

There may be some doubt concerning my ethics as a reviewer when I give away the information that the affairs of the household turn out to be not what they

seem in the first act. Perhaps this should be kept a secret from potential audiences, but if so, that delightful veteran, Lucile Watson, shouldn't have been cast for the role of the presumably prim and puritanical mother. No theatergoer in his right mind would expect Miss Watson to go through a comedy being a snob; disapproving of young love and frowning upon the occasional taking of a convivial drink.

It is, I believe, equally true that when Nell Hamilton sets out to play a handsome but priggish and stuffy fellow, he goes about it with a grim and thoroughgoing gusto which would make it difficult for an audience to feel that the character he is enacting actually isn't stuffy at all. It may go to show that type-casting is wrong, but the fact that Miss Watson is supposed to be unsympathetic in the first act and Mr. Hamilton sympathetic does help to destroy the second-act surprise when they turn out rather differently.

Arlene Francis

One reason why it seems regrettable that "Late Love" isn't a more adroit comedy is that Ar-

lene Francis has the role of the portrait painter who comes to the rescue. Miss Francis is a brilliant and resourceful comedienne, and here she is offering a deft, witty and thoroughly charming performance that almost lures one into the occasional belief that the play, too, is witty. With both Miss Francis and Miss Watson in the cast, "Late Love" gets off to a fine head start toward success, and it is a shame that the dramatist couldn't keep up with them.

The other players are likewise helpful. Elizabeth Montgomery makes a most attractive and appealing debut as the romantic daughter of the household, and Cliff Robertson, also in his first Broadway appearance, is excellent as the author's secretary. Frank Albertson appears pleasantly as a business man who had thought he was one of the writer's admirers, and Ann Dere is, as usual, competent as a family retainer. "Late Love" has pleasant scenes and agreeable people, but it is too inexpert a comedy to be satisfying.

Journal American

October 14, 1953

Well-Acted Comedy Has Little Distinction

By JOHN McCLAIN

THERE ARE MANY MOMENTS of hilarity, sporadic sorties with tenderness and suspense in "Late Love," the new Rosemary Casey comedy which opened at the National Theatre last night. The performances are on a uniformly high level and there is an all-around sense of ease and capability.

But this may not be enough to lift a mild and sometimes faltering vehicle into a popular success.

The story takes an interminable and often-dreary first act to get under way—a period filled with speeches of the "of-course - you - know - Miss - Warburton - who - etc - etc" school—comes to life for brief moments in the second act, then makes a game though not entirely successful effort to finish off with suitable flags and fireworks for the third and concluding act.

It is all endlessly pat and polished, it is difficult to object seriously to the characters or situations. On the other hand it seems to have very little distinction.

Simple Situation

Miss Casey has chosen a simple and highly workable

situation to tee off with. A famous lady portraitist moves into the country home of a prominent widower-writer to paint his portrait.

Almost at once she discovers the premises to be dominated by the writer's mother, an impossible old harridan who won't permit smoking, radios or liquor in the house, who insists on punctuality at meals, and otherwise browbeats everyone into a state of timorous dejection.

But of course the painter is a lady of colossal charm and almost inhuman perception. In no time she has fostered the romance of her subject's daughter and his male secretary, a young scholar not considered suitable by the father. At the same time she is herself the center of a growing romance

with the father and his other guest, a humorous broker.

But she still has the leisure to charm the bonnet off the grandmother, get the portrait painted, and eventually pull together all the loose ends of a plot which becomes infinitely more cluttered as the evening wears on.

That the entire proceedings don't become either dull or disastrously implausible, the author and producer can thank the talents of the entire cast and, probably Jack Wilson, who directed. (It is next to impossible, I contend, to tell where the actor leaves off and the director begins, or vice versa).

Adept Playing

The fact remains that Arlene Francis, as the fabulously lov-

able painter, gives an extremely adept performance and comes close to making one believe such a person could exist.

Lucille Watson, likewise, is probably the only living woman who could attempt the transition from a crotchety old matriarch to an adorable drunk in the space of about 20 minutes.

As the gay guest from Wall Street, Frankie Albertson succeeds with a lot of lines which might not have been otherwise funny and again proves his old merit with the treasured single and double-lake techniques.

Nell Hamilton does his dead best to be suave, sinister, vain, charming, brilliant and imbecile all at once. If he didn't always succeed he can hardly be blamed.

One exceptionally bright and unfailing light in the proceedings is the presence of Elizabeth Montgomery, making her Broadway debut as the daughter. Here is a more consistent part but this offspring of Bob Montgomery (an actor, too) plays it with charm and confidence. She has infinite promise.

And Cliff Robertson, her beau, succeeds admirably in the several truly warming love scenes they play together.

"Late Love" flaws and all, could offer a great deal of amusement to a lot of people. I hope it makes the grade.